



Campaign 2004

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ✪ Thursday, March 25, 2004

Press Contact:
Katie Wright
(703) 683-5004
Vol. 8, No. 8
www.mrc.org

Network Reporters Treat the Former Anti-Terrorism Advisor's Testimony As Authoritative, Not Biased

Credible Clarke vs. Ferocious White House

Beginning with Lesley Stahl's promotional interview on Sunday's *60 Minutes*, the broadcast networks signaled that Richard Clarke's testimony to the September 11th commission would be a crucial moment of truth-telling. So in spite of the contradictions in his story, the networks yesterday presented Clarke as a nonpartisan whistle-blower, while the Bush administration's efforts to counter him were portrayed as petty and calculated.

■ **Wednesday's CBS Evening News** was the most pro-Clarke broadcast, as fill-in anchor John Roberts promoted his "dramatic and damning testimony about the failures that led to the nation's worst terrorist attack." Roberts gushed: "It is on rare occasion that one could describe a hearing on Capitol Hill as 'electrifying,' but today's was that and more.... What Richard Clarke had to say captivated all who heard it."

After Roberts summarized Clarke as accusing "President Bush of bungling the war on terror," reporter Jim Stewart puffed Clarke up: "Few people have as many credentials to level such charges." Bill Plante presented documentation of Clarke's contradictions as a panicky tactic: "The Bush White House remains in crisis mode....Continuing its strenuous efforts to counter Clark's charges, the administration alerted reporters to a telephone briefing which Clarke offered in August 2002."

Plante, one of the reporters listening to Clarke that day, recounted how Clarke "painted a decidedly upbeat picture" of Bush's early anti-terrorism efforts. Clarke in 2002 had applauded how Bush changed Clinton's policy "from one of rollback of al-Qaeda over the course of five years, which it had been, to a new strategy that called for the rapid elimination of al-Qaeda." That's completely at odds with Clarke's diatribe on *60 Minutes* about how Bush "ignored"

al-Qaeda before 9/11, yet Plante last night just passed along Clarke's excuse that his 180 degree shift was merely "a matter of tone."

■ **Over on ABC's World News Tonight**, anchor Charles Gibson — who helped stoke the story as he interviewed Clarke twice on *Good Morning America* this week — called it "the most anticipated moment of the hearings." Gibson's introduction contrasted Clarke's apology to 9/11 families with supposedly mean critics: "The simplicity of his statement belies the ferocity of the fight the White House is waging to discredit Richard Clarke."

White House reporter Terry Moran trumpeted that Clarke "leveled a damning indictment against President Bush," but he was also the only network reporter who pointed out how some of the commissioners faulted Clarke for not making his charges in any of his private sessions with them, which lasted 14 hours. Moran explained: "He says he was never asked what he says was the critical question: Iraq."

■ **On NBC Nightly News**, David Gregory led his story with Clarke's admission that nothing Bush might have done could have stopped the 9/11 attacks: "Clarke accused the Bush administration of failing to make terrorism a top priority when it came into office, but he also admitted that if officials here had listened to him sooner, it still probably would not have stopped 9/11."

But Gregory's conclusion rejected the idea that Clarke had an ulterior motive: "Clarke says he is coming down so hard on the Bush White House because he believes strongly that the invasion of Iraq has undermined the war on terror and strengthened the culprits behind 9/11."

— Brent Baker and Rich Noyes

Wednesday's CBS Evening News was the most pro-Clarke broadcast. John Roberts gushed, "What Richard Clarke had to say captivated all who heard it."

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesperson, please contact Katie Wright at (703) 683-5004